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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6930

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 5019

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5029

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2698

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5686

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6559

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7787

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001721

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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, JUNE 13-20

¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for June 13-20, 2008, that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- Congress and JDS Team Up Against the BJP in Karnataka
- Jammu and Kashmir: Amarnath Yatra Begins
- Presumed "Dead" Former Bonded Laborers Attempt to Immolate Themselves
- From the Sewers of Andhra Pradesh to the New York Fashion Scene

Congress and JDS Team Up Against the BJP in Karnataka

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¶2. (U) The Congress Party and Janata Dal (Secular) party (JDS) have taken the first steps towards formal cooperation in Karnataka in the wake of their recent electoral drubbing at the hands of the BJP in the state's May legislative assembly elections. Congress and the JDS announced on June 16 an agreement that the two parties will cooperate on nominations to the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of India's parliament, where Karnataka has 12 seats) and the state's legislative council (the upper house of the state's parliament, which has 75 seats). The press reported that the agreement followed discussions between Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and JDS chief (and former Prime Minister) Deve Gowda. The new Congress-JDS alignment allowed the Congress Party to pick up two of the four Rajya Sabha seats up for election on June 19. The BJP won the other two seats.

¶3. (SBU) Revana Gowda, son of JDS leader and former Prime Minister Deve Gowda, told Consulate Chennai that he expects this agreement to initiate a long-term relationship between his party and Congress. He also said he expected greater floor coordination between the two parties in order to create an effective opposition to the BJP in the state. Roshan Baig, a Congress Party member of the state's legislative assembly who won big in the recent elections, told us that the only way his party can win a majority of Karnataka's Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's parliament) seats in next year's national elections is if it cooperates with the JDS.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The BJP had hoped that Congress and JDS would be unable to cooperate as a united opposition. The BJP has, therefore, refrained from wooing individual opposition

assembly members to defect to its side, fearing that this would encourage Congress and JDS to unite. Now that the opposition parties have apparently decided to cooperate, the BJP may well start seeking to encourage defectors, particularly from the JDS, which is looking increasingly brittle.

#### Jammu and Kashmir: Amarnath Yatra Begins

15. (SBU) Outgoing Jammu and Kashmir Governor Lt. General S.K. Sinha kicked off the Amarnath pilgrimage season on June 18, leading devotees in chanting religious hymns and prayers. Thirty thousand pilgrims made it to the shrine on the first day. The Amarnath shrine, one of the most famous Hindu temples, is located at about 12,000 feet, 140 kilometers from Srinagar. The last stretch of the journey is on foot and takes days to complete. In past years Hindu pilgrims to the Amarnath shrine have been targeted by jihadi terrorists seeking the end of Indian rule in Kashmir. Jammu and Kashmir government authorities say that they have arranged adequate security for the devotees this year amid reports that thousands of security personnel are lining the route to the caves. Indian security forces are concerned that the increase in infiltration attempts this year presages increased violence by jihadi groups to disrupt a record tourist season and state elections, due in October.

16. (SBU) Retired Lt. General Sinha is due to be replaced this month by N.N. Vohra, who was the Prime Minister's

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special envoy for Kashmir until his new appointment. Vohra is the first civilian in more than 15 years to hold that post. Sinha is leaving under controversy relating to his role as Chairman of the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board, which manages the annual pilgrimage. He is under heavy criticism from many in the valley who accuse him of improperly arranging the transfer of 100 acres of state-owned forestland to the Board. Mirwaiz Omar Farooq of the separatist All Party Hurriyat Conference said, "We want to make it clear we won't allow anyone to occupy our land." The controversy also promises to become an election issue. Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party President Mehbooba Mufti spoke up against the land transfer, accusing the Board of "running a state within a state" and blaming the National Conference party for enacting the legislation that established the Board. National Conference leader Omar Abdullah responded by chiding Mufti for not amending/repealing the legislation when her father was Chief Minister of the state in 2002-2005 if her party found the law objectionable.

#### Presumed "Dead" Former Bonded Laborers Attempt to Immolate Themselves

17. (U) To protest an erroneous and egregious filing error, 150 presumably "dead" former laborers threatened to immolate themselves in front of the district collector's office in the Orissa city of Bargarh. Most in the group were over the age of 70, originally hailed from Jharkand, and were demanding a rehabilitation package that they never received after being "rescued" from bondage in 1981-82. Bargarh Additional District Magistrate Mr. Meghnath Nayak assured the protestors that they would be given a proper rehabilitation package.

18. (U) In 1981-82, the district administration identified about 1,200 bonded laborers in 10 villages in Jharkand. The following year, the state compensated 480 and assured others they would get a rehabilitation package "shortly." In 2004, the district administration conducted a survey on bonded laborers via an NGO, BISWA. The survey reported that there were no bonded laborers in the district and falsely asserted that 720 laborers had died.

19. (U) Comment: 'Tis a comedy of errors to include

bureaucratic ineptitude, red tape, and NGO incompetence. Stories like this regularly pepper the national and vernacular papers, but are never front page news or found above the fold. In many Indian state governments, the smorgasbord of administrative challenges (e.g. woefully insufficient resources, corruption and competing priorities) are simply too ordinary to be newsworthy. As a result, official bungling is a frequent occurrence.

From the Sewers of Andhra Pradesh to the New York Fashion Scene  
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¶10. (U) Fifty female (former) toilet cleaners from a small village in Andhra Pradesh will show off their new vocational skills in the field of clothing design at a fashion show on July 2 at the UN headquarters in New York City. Coinciding with the UN's 2008 International Year of Sanitation, aimed to raise awareness and encourage development of basic sanitation practices, Indian designer Abdul Halidar teamed up with NGO Sulabh International. Sulabh is one of the largest social services organizations in India, with 60,000 volunteers who promote environmental sanitation, health and hygiene. It has pioneered safe and hygienic waste disposal technology in India. (Note: The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements recognized Sulabh's cost-effective and appropriate sanitation system as a global 'Urban Best Practice' at the Habitat-II conference held at Istanbul (Turkey), in June, 1996. The Economic and Social Council of United Nations has granted Special Consultative Status to Sulabh in recognition of its outstanding service to mankind. End Note.) The famous

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designer along with the famous NGO, started a rehabilitation centre to train these women in various skills such as clothes making, embroidery, dyeing and stitching; providing them with an opportunity to make ends meet, become more independent, and teaching basic literary skills. The Bulgarian Embassy first hosted a small fashion show.

¶11. (U) Comment: While not literally a rags to riches story, it is close. In India, where sewerage facilities and flush latrines are available to about 30 percent of population in urban areas and only 3 percent of rural population, issues of cleanliness are directly associated with class and caste. Sulabh technology has helped thousands of scavengers rise from the demeaning practice of physically cleaning and carrying human excreta. While the fifty women have certainly been empowered, perhaps their presence in NYC may be poignant enough to further raise awareness of sanitation issues for the 200 UN delegates and 150 country heads.  
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